

(INTERIM REPORT No. 1)

HISTORICAL RESEARCH ON THE LOCATION OF THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE SITE

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September 11, 1998

Attached is a compilation of the historical research that we have found, to date, regarding the Sand Creek Massacre. Our scope of work limited our efforts to those archival resources in the State of Colorado. To date, we have concentrated our research to Denver and Boulder, and we still have additional resources that need to be investigated in this area. We are also planning, before the completion of the final report, to visit the Chivington and Cheyenne Wells areas to investigate local resources.

At this point, our research points to two probable locations for the Sand Creek Massacre: The north bend of Sand Creek (as identified by George Bent); and the south bend, generally known as the Dawson Bend.

The North Bend (The George Bent Site)

As demonstrated later in this report, George Bent – who was half-Cheyenne and who was at the Sand Creek Massacre – located the massacre site on the north bend of Sand Creek. Bent, who was living at the village site, was very specific about the location of the massacre. Bent, working in collaboration with George Hyde, apparently used the 1890-91 U.S.G.S. base maps as his guide. Moreover, Bent specifically rejected two other locations, including the Dawson Bend. The fact that Bent was familiar with the Indian trails in the area, and specifically identified the “Indian trail made by lodge poles” is significant since Bent also asserted that the camp was located where the trail crossed Sand Creek. It has been suggested that because the shape of the river bends may have changed by the time of the 1890-91 U.S.G.S. maps, that Bent was simply confused about the location. However, Bent’s demonstration of knowledge of the topography – and his knowledge of the Indian trails – would argue against that theory.

The South Bend (Dawson Bend)

While Bent’s map placed the massacre at the north bend, two other maps place it at the south/Dawson bend: the Bonsall Map of 1868, and the Baumbach Map of 1938.

Lieutenant Samuel Bonsall – an army scout and (like Bent) a credible source of information – sketched a map in 1868 that located the “Chivington Massacre” in the vicinity of Dawson Bend. A 1938 Cheyenne County map of the “Chivington Battle Field” also places it in the vicinity of the Dawson Bend. According to the legend on the map, it was traced from an old drawing made by John Baumbach, “an early settler of the vicinity.” This map shows the massacre site as being

in Section 19, Township 17S, Range 45W, 6th P.M., Kiowa County, which is northeast of the current “south bend.”

The Baumbach map also shows Sand Creek running through the southern portion of Section 19. This corresponds to the 1879-80 GLO records, which also indicate that the northern edge of Sand Creek extended into Section 19. Thus, even though there is historical evidence that the massacre took place in the vicinity of the Dawson Bend, there is also significant evidence that the massacre took place in Section 19 (rather than Section 25, where the Colorado Historical Society marker is located).

Following is a chronology of information that has been found, to date, regarding the location of the Sand Creek Massacre:

DIARIES, SOLDIERS' TESTIMONIES, AND CONTEMPORARY NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS OF SAND CREEK MASSACRE

Contemporary accounts of the Sand Creek Massacre – such as diaries, soldiers' testimonies, and newspaper accounts – generally describe the massacre site as being anywhere from 25 to 45 miles north of old Fort Lyon. Most accounts say it is 40 miles north-to-northeast of old Fort Lyon. Immediately after the massacre, Chivington described it as being 40 miles north of Fort Lyon, and the soldiers generally agreed (or fell in line) with that estimate. Unfortunately, however, this information does not provide conclusive evidence as to the location of the massacre site. The north bend of Sand Creek is (as the crow flies) 38.81 miles from old Fort Lyon; the south/Dawson bend is 34.21 miles from the fort. Presumably, the actual route that the soldiers took would have been longer, as they would have had to adjust their travel according to the topography.

All the soldiers report that they traveled at night, and several accounts discuss how they followed the north star. One of the more descriptive accounts was by Sand Creek veteran Morse Coffin who noted, “Our course was almost exactly under the north star most of the time, but towards morning veered a little to the right or north by northeast” (Morse Coffin letters, Carey Collection, University of Denver Archives.) At least two soldiers, John Dailey and George Wells, reported that they followed an Indian trail to the village site (John Dailey diary, Denver Public Library; and George Wells, letter to *The Miner's Register*, Central City, CO, December 27, 1864). John Smith, an Indian agent and interpreter who was at the Indian village at the time of the attack, described the village as being on Sand Creek “about forty miles, a little east of north from Fort Lyon” (*Sand Creek Papers, “Testimonies and Statements Reflecting Facts Concerning the Killing of Cheyenne and Arapaho Indians on November 29, 1864 by the Third Colorado Volunteers”*).

Contemporary accounts also consistently describe the Indian village as being on the north side of Sand Creek. Irving Howbert gave the following description of the Indian village: “Just as the sun was coming up over the eastern horizon, we reached the top of a ridge, and away off down in the valley to the northwest, we saw a great number of Indian tents, forming a village of unusual size. . . .” (Irving Howbert, *Memories of a Lifetime in the Pike's Peak Region*). The accounts also consistently describe the village as being on the banks of the creek. There are also numerous accounts of how the soldiers burned the village after the massacre. Since there were

approximately 100 lodges (the highest estimate is 200) in the village, this would have been a large burn, of which there might be archeological evidence.

Overall, however, we have found that while there are numerous first-hand accounts of the massacre, most relate to the massacre itself or the controversy surrounding it, and there is very little specific locational information. To date, we have only searched the newspaper records available at the Denver Public Library. The library has microfilm copies of the major Denver newspapers; it also has clippings files that include some out-of-Denver newspaper articles. We still need to research the newspaper records available at the Colorado Historical Society, which has microfilm copies of papers from communities throughout the state, including those nearer the massacre site. We are also planning to visit these communities at a later date, to search local city and county records, as well as the holdings of local historical societies.

SAMUEL W. BONSTALL MAP, 1868

The earliest map that we are aware of at this time that specifically locates the “Chivington Massacre” site was drawn by Lieutenant Samuel W. Bonsall, 3rd Infantry. Bonsall led a detachment from Fort Lyon to Cheyenne Wells in the summer of 1868 and drew a map of that journey. This map marks the location of the massacre site. Jerry Greene has analyzed this map, which includes mileage markers from Fort Lyon. Based upon the mileage, as well as the general description of the area, Greene has concluded that the “Chivington Massacre” site on the Bonsall map is generally in the location of the south/Dawson bend. Greene also compared the Bonsall map to the aerial photography report prepared by Tom Baker, and noted that Bonsall’s descriptions of the two lakes – which were also noted in several soldiers’ accounts – corresponded with the lakes seen in the aerial photographs. (The soldiers crossed these shallow lakes on their way to the Indian village.)

COLORADO TERRITORY AND STATE MAPS, 1865 TO 1875

We also made copies of other early maps of the area. These include 1) “Map of Colorado Territory, Showing the System of Parks,” 1865; 2) “Map of Colorado Territory to accompany Hollister’s ‘Mines of Colorado,’” 1866; 3) “Map of Utah and Colorado (U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers),” 1869; 4) “Thayer’s Sectional Map of Colorado,” 1871; 5) “Colton’s Sectional & Topographical Map of Colorado,” 1872; and 6) “Asher & Adam’s Colorado,” 1875. None of these maps specifically show the Sand Creek Massacre site, but they are useful for showing the advent of early roads and railroads into the area.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE SURVEYS (1872-1880)

The majority of the study area was first surveyed by GLO in 1879-80. GLO had also conducted a partial survey in 1872, which covered only the “3rd Correction Line South” (north of the north bend).¹

¹ Note on survey methodology: Because of the nature of applying a square-grid system on the curvature of the earth, a correction survey of an east-west line was done at certain intervals to make adjustments to the measurements. These correction surveys were conducted prior to surveying the rest of the area. Next, a crew surveyed the exterior lines of the townships (six miles/sections per side). Another crew then surveyed the section lines, subdividing each township into 36 sections. The exterior township lines were not resurveyed during the subdivision survey. During a survey, the crew walked the outside boundary of each

The field notes and maps did not note the massacre site in any way; that is, there is no mention of artifacts, burn spots, monuments, etc. There is also no indication of the "lodge pole trail" that crossed the creek. The surveys did show road crossings, which may be helpful, but are not the definitive answer to the question at this point.

However, the surveys did show that the bends of the creek have shifted. Since the surveys were conducted 15 years after the massacre, it should not be assumed that the 1879 location and the 1864 location were the same. However, the shifting nature of the river does demonstrate that the study area should be considered broadly.

Today's "north bend" was only a segment disconnected from the main creek, and it did not actually make a bend like today. (Actually, the bend today is still only a segment, as indicated on the U.S.G.S. map, but 1) it is still part of the main channel, when water flows, and 2) today it does make a bend). The river channel was northeast of today's course, so there was actually a different bend, over a third of a mile (about 670 yards) northeast of today's bend.

The south/Dawson bend also shows a change of course. In late 1879-early 1880, the creek route followed a "straighter" path that was northeast of today's bend. But, by spring 1880, the route appeared more similar to today's shape.

Because the south bend crosses a township line, it was the subject of three separate surveys: one township line survey (August 1879) and two subdivision surveys (January and May-June 1880). The township line survey indicated that the creek crossed between Section 24, T17S R46W and Section 19, T17S R45W, at a point 4 chains (88 yards) north of the south corner of the two sections. The creek bed was dry but the course was S 30° E. The route shown on the current 1979 U.S.G.S. (Kiowa County) map instead crosses between sections 25 and 30, setting up the river for a bend back to the north. Thus, this 1879-80 route placed the creek about one-third mile (about 586 yards) northeast of the center of its present bend.

The January 1880 survey of the section lines in T17S R46W confirmed on its map that the creek crossed in that location and came from a northwesterly direction. No creek crossing was shown between Sections 24 and 25 (where the creek route is today).

However, the spring 1880 survey of the section lines in T17S R45W presented a different route. The map showed a route through Section 30 much as it is today; that is, the creek crossed the township line to the west. Since the western boundary of Section 30 (that is, the township boundary) was not resurveyed in the spring 1880 survey, the field notes did not indicate the exact crossing point. However, the survey notes also did not indicate the creek crossing the northern

township, or the outside of each section (depending on whether it was a township or a subdivision survey). The surveyor noted precisely in his field notes what occurred as he walked that line, e.g. when a road or creek crossed, etc. These points were measured in chains from the beginning corner (one chain equals 66 feet). From those notations of points on the section lines, the remainder of the feature (creek, etc.) was sketched on a map. So the location of a feature *at* the intersection with the section lines is usually reliable, but the interpretation the surveyor made *within* each section is approximate. At the end of the one-mile section line, the surveyor noted his observations on vegetation, terrain, and soil type and quality. When all the section lines within a township were completed, the surveyor noted general observations about the whole township.

boundary of Section 30, which would been the likely place for the creek to cross in order to adhere to the other two survey locations. It is probable, therefore, that the creek route had shifted from a “straighter” route in January 1880 to a curved route in May-June 1880, which mimics today’s path.

The change in route is supported in other ways. It is consistent with the January 1880 surveyor’s description of that area: “Sandy Bottoms has but about 14 links [9.24 feet] of water which may be this side of Sandy bed [?] to-day *and the other side tomorrow.*” [emphasis added] In addition, the current U.S.G.S. map indicates that the bend is in a wide flat spot, so it is reasonable to think the creek could easily change route there.

HOMESTEAD RECORDS (BEGINNING IN LATE 1880S)

Euro-American settlers were relatively late in claiming land in the subject area. Although the area was surveyed in 1879-80, the earliest land claims did not occur until the late 1880s, almost 25 years after the massacre. Settlement was apparently difficult, since numerous claims were subsequently abandoned. Several land laws were used to claim land, including the Homestead Act, the Desert Land Law, and the Timber Culture Act. The Union Pacific Railroad received the odd-numbered sections in the area, patented in 1904.

The information available at the Bureau of Land Management Colorado State Office was not useful as far as directly applicable information. For instance, their records do not describe the appearance of the property. However, we have derived the necessary data on the claims to request the files from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY MAPS (DATING FROM 1890-91)

The agency’s earliest topographical maps for the subject area (surveyed in 1890-91) do not show any labels relating to the massacre site. However, they are helpful in determining the topography and the location of the river at the time. The maps were drawn at a 1:125,000 scale, and show a larger area (and therefore less detail) than on current topographical quadrangles (30’ compared to 7-1/2’). The contour intervals are 25 feet (compared to 10 foot intervals on the current topo maps).

Some geographical aspects are clearly discerned on these maps, while others are more difficult to discern. It is clear that there is a distinct big bend at the north bend area, as well as a bend at the south bend area. However, because of the differing scales of historic and current maps, it is difficult for us to judge precisely how the historic river course and shape compares to the current condition. We hope to obtain overlays of the maps that we can compare for more accurate interpretation.

GEORGE BENT MAPS

George Bent drew two maps directly related to Sand Creek. One is a map of the region (called the regional map in this report) and the other is a detail of the massacre site (called the site map in this report). Although researchers have been aware of both maps for some time, most people have dismissed the regional map as a rough sketch that is not valuable as a geographically accurate tool. We have discovered, however, that it is very likely that the base map was traced from the 1890-91 U.S.G.S maps (see above).

George Hyde sent the base regional map to George Bent “to get him to locate on it certain places mentioned in his narrative.” Thus, the majority of the marks on the map were made by Hyde, not Bent. This is quite apparent when viewing the original document, due to the different ink colors. It is also easy to differentiate Hyde’s clear printed letters from Bent’s scrawled cursive writing.

At first glance, the base regional map appears to be a sketch with no apparent geographical accuracy. However, if one lays the map on top of the 1890-91 U.S.G.S topographical maps, the features line up exactly. Specific distinctive drafting marks are repeated on the Hyde map, thus providing remarkable evidence that the base map is as accurate as the U.S.G.S map.

Bent specifically selected the point on the map for the massacre, and rejected two other sites. In 1928, Hyde wrote regarding the map, “The points on Sand Creek where running water is marked are numbered L [1 typed on a typewriter] and 2. I suggested to Bent that one of these points was the location of Black Kettle’s camp; but he said no and marked the camp where shown on the map.” The “1” marked the location of the south/Dawson’s bend. The “2” marked a spot near the intersection of Sand Creek (Big Sandy Creek) and Big Spring Creek, about six miles upstream from the “north bend.” The location of running water was noted because Bent had indicated in his letters that the camp was at a bend where the water ran year-round, even though other portions of the creek went dry.

The location of Bent’s “Indian trail made by lodge poles” is also significant since Bent said the camp was located where the trail crossed the creek. At first look, the line Bent drew looks simply like a hand-drawn impromptu line, not an accurate representation on a map. However, when looking at the Bent/Hyde map over the U.S.G.S. maps, it seems that Bent was quite aware of the terrain in the region, since the line follows the logical route across the topography. That Bent would draw his trail to avoid ridges and follow gentle terrain on a paper where these features were not shown strongly suggests that Bent was quite precise in his drawing.

This apparent knowledge of the terrain also supports the idea that Bent was quite aware of which bend he was selecting on the map. It has been suggested that because the shape of the river bends may have changed by the time of the 1890 U.S.G.S. maps, that Bent was simply confused about the location. However, his demonstration of knowledge of the topography would argue against that theory.

Bent’s other Sand Creek map, the site map, portrays the village, with specific lodges named. The bend of the river is almost an “L” shape on north-south and east-west lines, and the river enters the “L” from the northwest. This view is not consistent with the alignment nor the creek approach of either the north or south bend. In both sites, the creek enters the bend more from the northeast. It is difficult to know how precise Bent intended this site map to be, but it does not seem to provide strong evidence regarding the location of the massacre.

NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS, 1888-1937

In 1888, Chivington may have revisited the site when he took part in a “celebration” of the massacre that was held in the town Chivington; this needs further research (*Lamar Daily News*, August 7, 1950). Interestingly, in that same year, Chivington also said that the “Indian camp was as near Denver as it was Pueblo” (“Reminiscences,” *Field and Farm*, February 25, 1888.)

On October 11, 1904, the *Denver News*, in an introduction to a reprint of Morse Coffin's letters, noted that "the exact site of the battle is about twelve miles northwest of Chivington, Colo." (Dawson Scrapbooks, 10:469). By 1908, however, the exact location of the massacre was already something of a mystery. In that year, veterans of Sand Creek – including Morse Coffin – made a trip to Sand Creek to revisit the massacre site. According to the newspaper, they visited "the Nigger Charlie beef corral" on Sand Creek, where a local resident said, "that's where they tell me [the massacre] come off." They also visited the Creaghe Ranch, where Dick Creaghe told them that the massacre site was "bout half a mile from here . . . Found a lot of arrow heads there once and there's bones up on the bluff the other side of the creek. Human bones." However, the veterans couldn't agree that either site was the area of the massacre. ("Veterans of 1864 Revisit Scene of Indian Battle on the Banks of Sand Creek," *The Denver Post*, July 26, 1908.)

A 1923 newspaper article ("Indian Battles in Colorado," *The Rocky Mountain News*, July 8, 1923) noted only that the massacre took place "somewhere in [the] vicinity" of Chivington. In 1937, when a re-enactment of the massacre was being planned, a Montrose (CO) newspaper noted that, "No relic of the massacre can be found and the site of battle remains indefinite. . . Periodic flooding of Sand creek has washed away all remnants of the slaughter" ("Restaging Chivington Massacre Planned Near Colorado Village Where Outrageous Attack Made," *Montrose Press*, October 18, 1937).

JOHN BAUMBACH/COUNTY SURVEYOR MAP, 1938

In 1938, the Office of County Surveyor, Cheyenne County, produced a map of the "Chivington Battle Field." The map was traced from an old drawing made by John Baumbach, described as "an early settler of the vicinity." (We are planning to do additional research on Baumbach.) This map shows the massacre site as being in Section 19, Township 17S, Range 45W, 6th P.M., Kiowa County, which is the section northeast of the current south bend.

The Baumbach map also shows Sand Creek as running through the southern portion of Section 19. This corresponds to the 1879-1880 GLO records, which also showed Sand Creek running through Section 19. Thus, from 1879 to 1938, the northern edge of Sand Creek apparently extended into Section 19, at least intermittently. This is not to say, of course, that the river was always in Section 19. As the GLO surveyors noted, the creek could be flowing on one edge of the riverbed on one day, and the other edge of the riverbed on the next. (The 1975 aerial photographs taken for the 1981 soil survey map of Kiowa County also show the floodplain for Sand Creek extending from Section 19 to Section 30.) However, for at least 59 years (1879-1938) – the beginning date of which was only 15 years after the Sand Creek massacre – the northern edge of Sand Creek bed ran through Section 19. One can speculate that the Indians – who were familiar with this area – would not have camped in the creek bed and risked flooding, but on its banks. The accounts of soldiers also indicate that the village was on the northern banks of the creek.

Also, the Baumbach map shows an irrigation ditch extending from Sand Creek in the extreme southeastern corner of Section 19. The recent aerial photographs taken by Tom Baker also show an irrigation ditch in Section 19, although it crosses into the section much farther to the west. An irrigation ditch can also be seen on current U.S.G.S. maps (dated 1982). But, it must be noted, the ditch on the map is not in the same sections as shown on the U.S.G.S. maps. However, these two ditches – the one on the Baumbach map, and the one on the U.S.G.S. maps – essentially

parallel each other, approximately one section apart. We will check with the State Engineer's Office for additional information on this ditch (or ditches). However, the discrepancy may be explained by a handwritten note that was attached to the back of the Baumbach map, and which indicates that there was some problem regarding the numbering of sections on the map.

COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY PLACES A MARKER AT THE SAND CREEK MASSACRE SITE, 1950

In 1950, the Colorado Historical Society marked the Sand Creek massacre site with a stone memorial. Newspaper accounts at that time noted that Levi Rutledge owned the land on which the massacre took place ("Two-Three Hundred Attend Dedication Sand Creek Marker," *Lamar Daily News*, August 7, 1950). A Lamar newspaper also noted that the "Kiowa county road department has assisted in the program by grading and making some improvements on the dirt road leading from the highway to the massacre site." The article also stated that Paul Steward, "Lamar monument worker and lifetime student of Indian lore" carved the monument and led a tour of the massacre site ("Dedication Services at Sand Creek Battleground Site To Be Sunday Near Chivington; State Historian Speaker," *Lamar Daily News*, August 2, 1950).

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(As the title indicates, this book is basically a compilation of statements made by soldiers of the Third Colorado Volunteers regarding Sand Creek. We xeroxed "Document No. 29, "Excerpts from the official military report of Colonel Chivington concerning the Sand Creek Battle" December 16, 1864; Document No. 24, "Testimony of Mr. John S. Smith before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War," March 14, 1865; and Document No. 30, "Excerpts from the testimony of Colonel J.M. Chivington.")

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Tappan, Samuel Forster. Manuscript Collection. Colorado Historical Society. (Tappan was a member of the commission investigating the Sand Creek Massacre. The collection includes correspondence between Tappan and George Bent and William Tecumseh Sherman, some of it regarding the Sand Creek massacre. No specific information regarding the location of the massacre site.)

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Wells, George A. Letter to *The Miner's Register*, Central City, CO. Letter published December 27, 1864. Carey Collection, Box 3, Diaries Re: Sand Creek." "Wells, a Sand Creek volunteer, noted that on the march from Ft. Lyon "no road was visible, and we had no intimation of our true destination until we came upon the well worn trails that marked the line of Indian travel. . . . Night wore away and we were still making good time along the trails." (xerox)

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HISTORIC MAPS COPIED

1865. "Map of Colorado Territory, Showing the System of Parks." Drawn by Frederick J. Ebert under the direction of the Governor Wm. Gilpin. Published by Jacob Monk, Philadelphia, Pa., 1865. Annotated by Raymond Carey. Carey Collection, University of Denver.

1866. "Map of Colorado Territory to accompany Hollister's 'Mines of Colorado,' corrected from the Public Surveys of 1866." Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

1868. Map accompanying the "Journal of the march of a detachment of the men belonging to the Garrison of Fort Lyon, C.T., under the command of Lieut. S[amuel] W. Bonsall, 3rd Infantry, from Old Fort Lyon C.T., to Cheyenne Wells, pursuant to S.O. No. 66 Hdqrs., Fort Lyon C.T., June 12, 1868."

1869. "Map of Utah and Colorado." Prepared by order of Lieutenant General W.T. Sherman, drawn by H. De Werthern. Compiled under direction of Bvt. Col. Hm E. Merrill, Maj. Engr. St. Louis 1869. U.S. Army Corps of Topographical Engineers. Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

1871 "Thayer's Sectional Map of Colorado compiled from the plats and records of the Surveyor General's Office," Denver, Colorado, 1871. Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

1872 "Colton's Sectional & Topographical Map of Colorado." Published by G.W. and C.B. Colton & Company, 172 William Street, New York, 1872. Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

1875. "Asher & Adam's Colorado, Entered According to Act of Congress in the Years 1875 by Asher & Adams in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington." Western History Department, Denver Public Library.

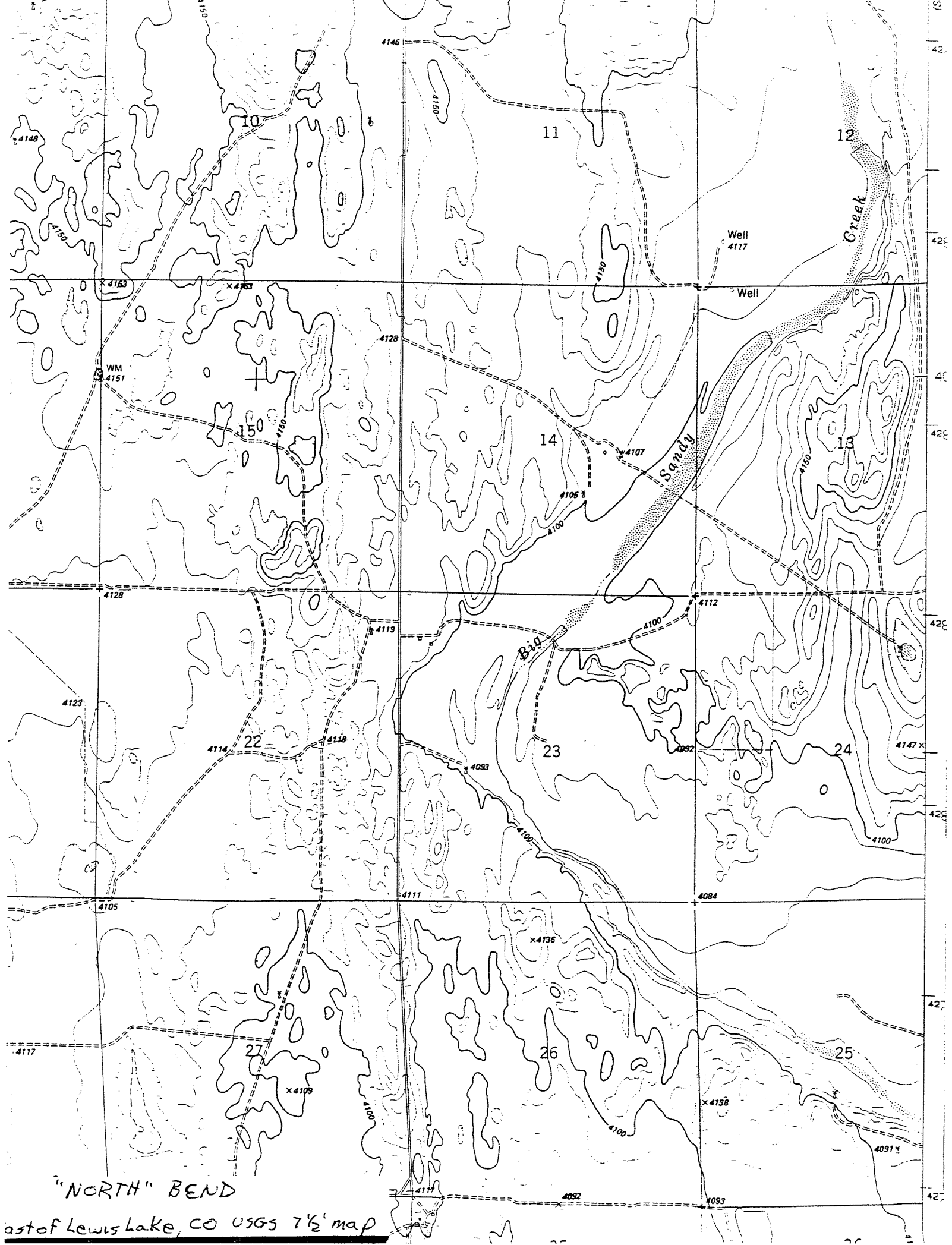
1879-1880 Survey maps, Townships 16, 17 South, Ranges 45, 46, 47 West. General Land Office. Bureau of Land Management, Colorado State Office.**

1890-1891 "Cheyenne Wells" and "Kit Carson." Topographical maps. U.S. Geological Survey.**

19—(?). Regional Map of Sand Creek Massacre Area. Drawn by George Bent and George Hyde. SMSS/Bent Hyde Collection, University of Colorado at Boulder, Library.**

1938 "Chivington Battle Field." "Traced from old drawing made by John Baumbach, an early settler of the vicinity." Office of County Surveyor, Cheyenne County, Colorado, September 12, 1938. Colorado Historical Society.

**Oversize attachments to report



"NORTH" BEND

east of Lewis Lake, CO USGS 7 1/2' map

Showing
THE SYSTEM OF PARKS.

Drawn by Frederick J. Ebert
under direction of the
GOVERNOR W^M GILPIN.

Published by JACOB MONK, Philadelphia, Pa.

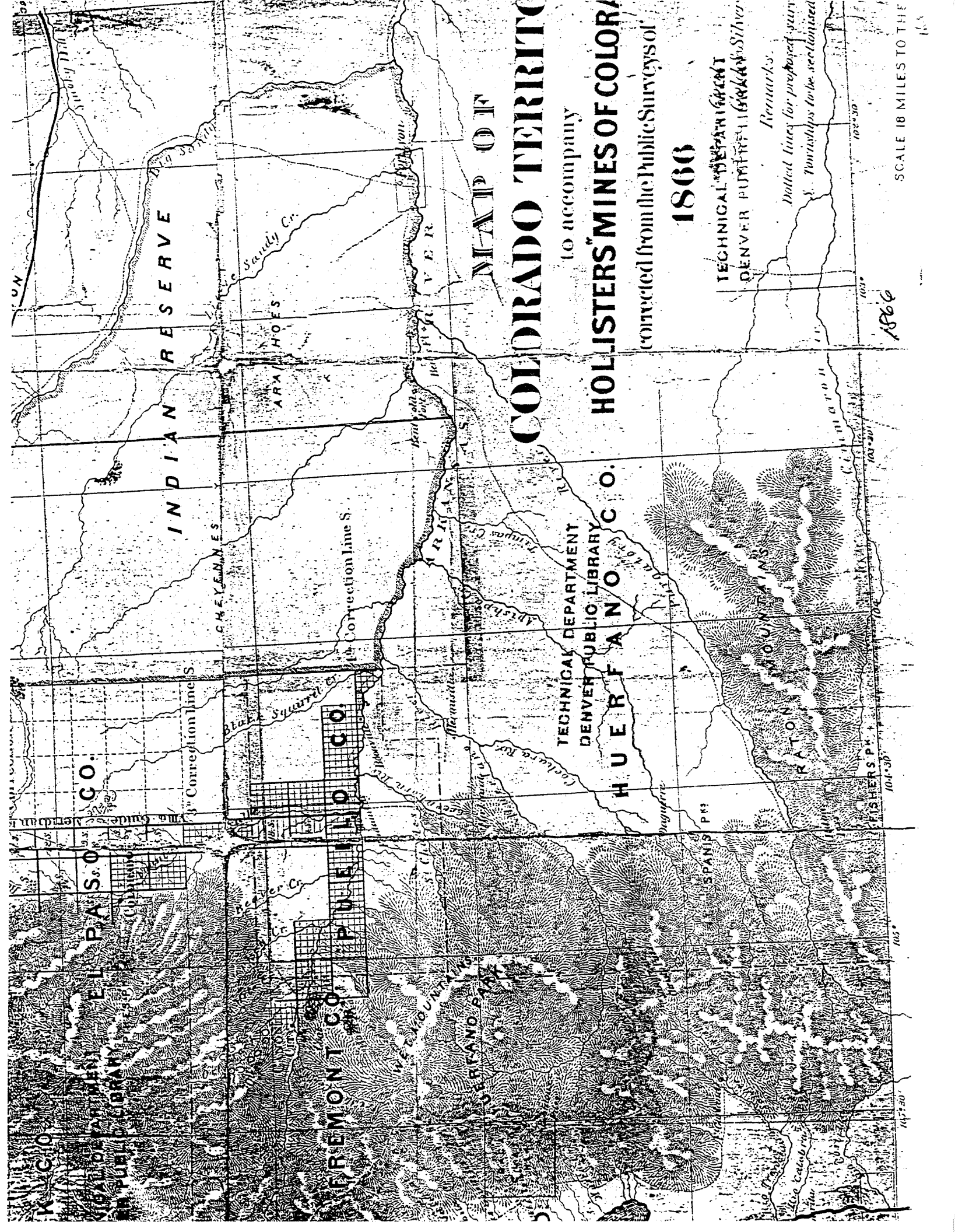
1865.

Thus, Sinclair's last Philadel

CC.

PANCO CO.

DUELAS CO.



MAP OF

COLORADO TERRITORY

to accompany

HOLLISTER'S MINES OF COLORADO

connected from the Public Surveys of

1866

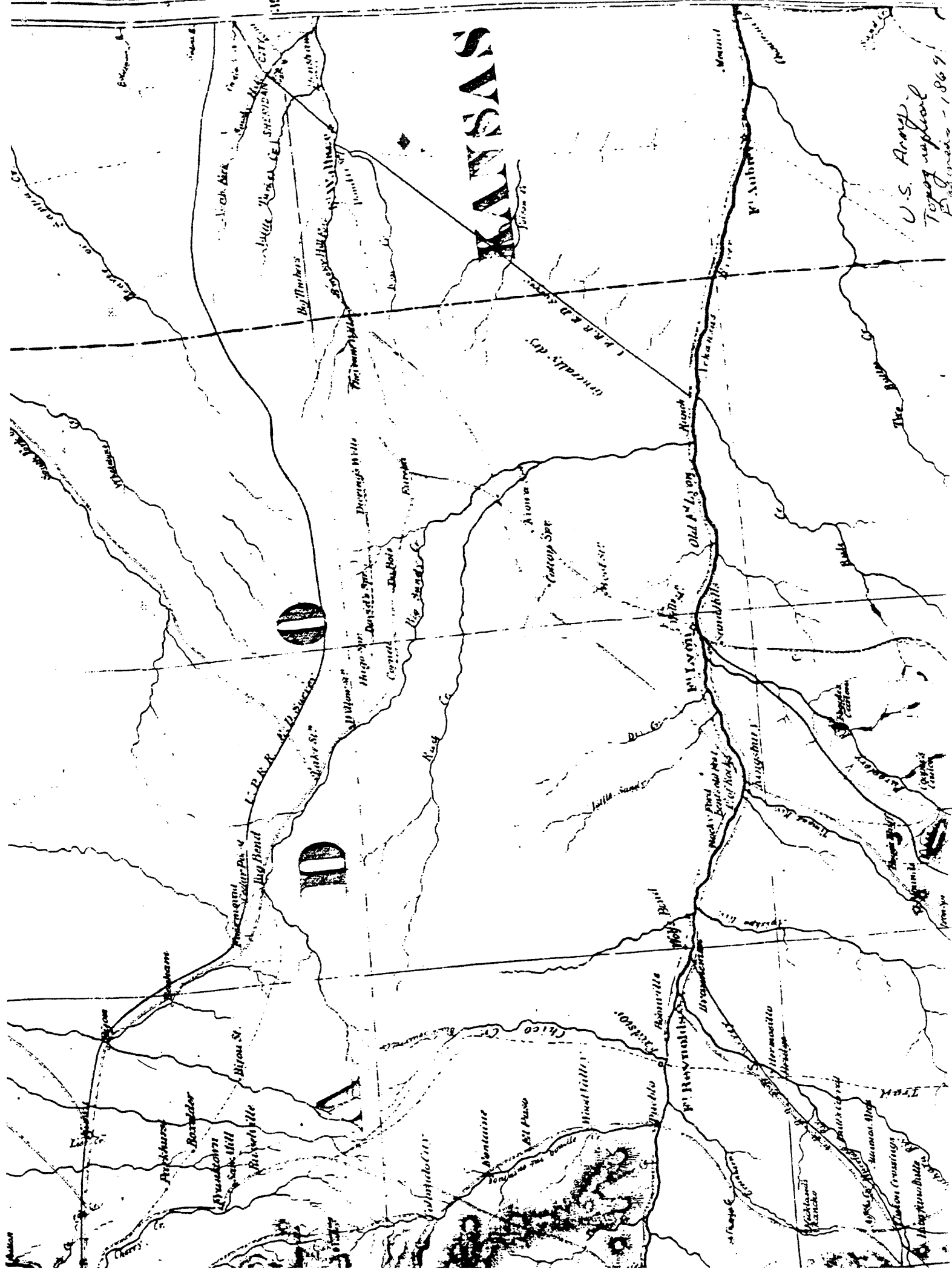
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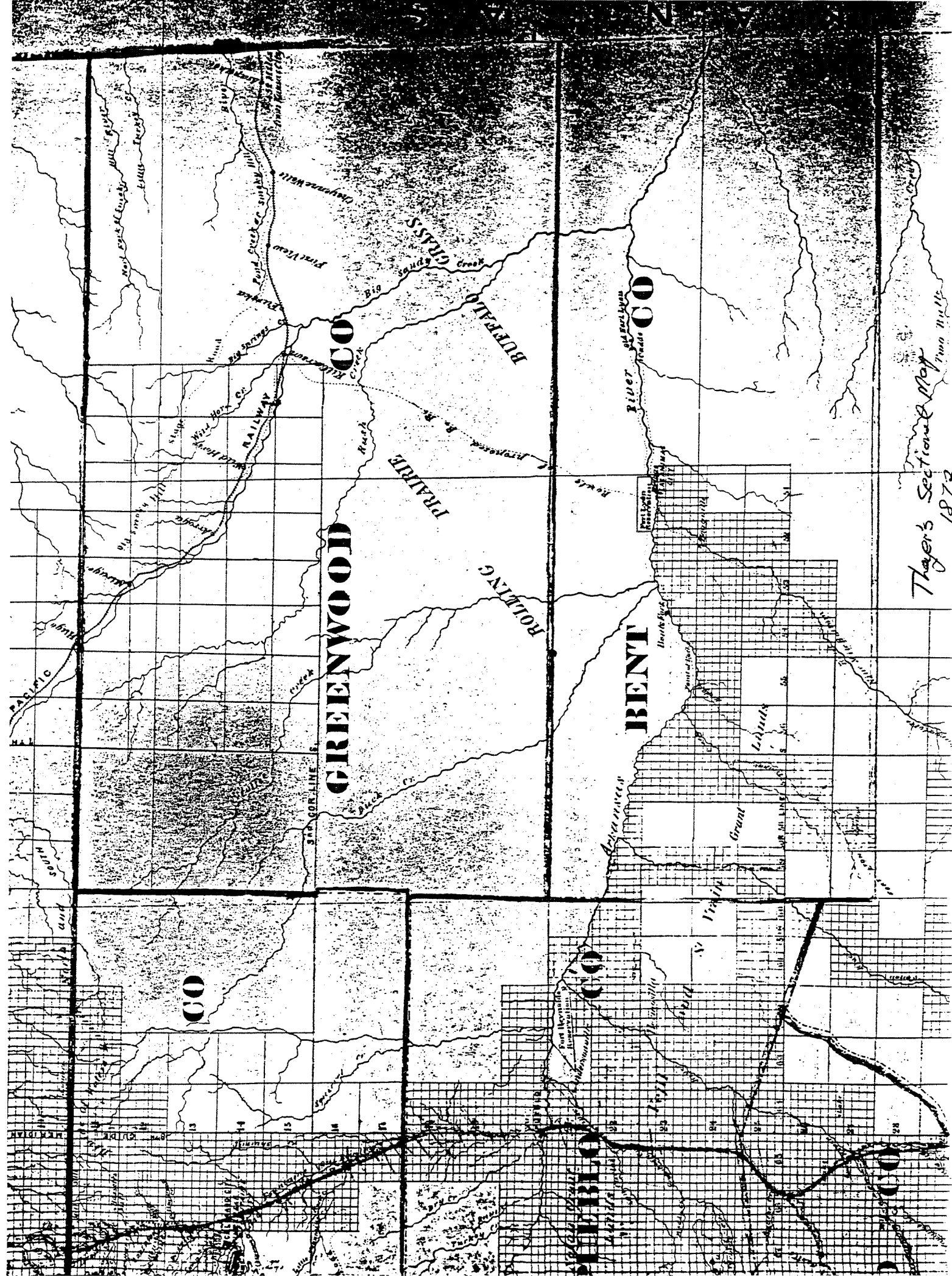
Dotted lines for proposed survey
Townships to be sectioned

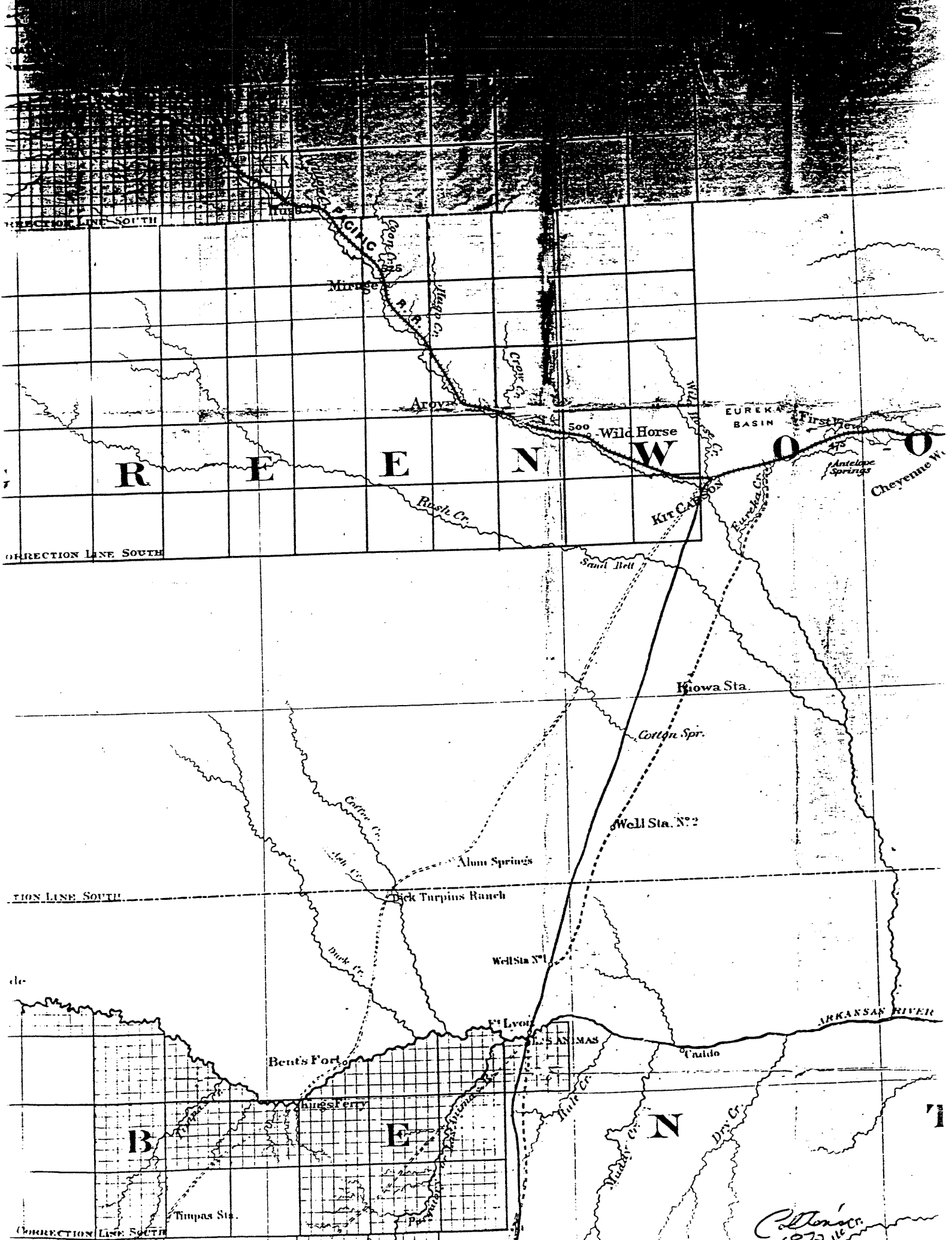
1866

SCALE 18 MILES TO THE



U.S. Army
Topog. Map
Kansas - 1867





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1872

